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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 1048
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3045
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC

UNCLAS ASHGABAT 000189

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: INDIAN AMBASSADOR: MUSLIMS LOOK TO
THE U.S. WITH OPTIMISM

¶1. (SBU) In a 4 February meeting with the Charge, India's Ambassador to Turkmenistan, Mohammed Afzal, emphasized that Muslims everywhere are "looking with great hope to President Obama" for a positive change in their relationship with the U.S. Speaking, "from my own perspective as an Indian Muslim," he said that the Muslim community feels greatly encouraged by what they perceive as the new U.S. administration's desire to reach out to them, as well as its apparent plans to improve the situation between the U.S. and Iran.

¶2. (SBU) Ambassador Afzal noted that the U.S. has traditionally had public relations problems with Indian Muslims, in part because most do not read English, and get news and opinion from the Urdu-language press. The U.S. needs to do more to reach out to that community, he said, through Urdu publications. He said that the Indian people are "not interested in war," but said that the government is "under pressure" to take action since the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November. The discrimination against the "Muhajer" (immigrants from India who arrived in 1948) in Pakistan is well known to Indian Muslims. For example, there is a one percent hiring quota to limit the number of Muhajer in public sector jobs.

¶3. (SBU) The Indian government offers a number of scholarships for short term study (several weeks) in India to Turkmen professionals. Afzal was surprised to learn of the difficulties that some U.S. program alumni have faced upon their return to Turkmenistan, noting that one participant in an Indian program was refused leave from the Carpet Museum in order to take part. She opted instead to quit her job, but was hired back when she returned.

¶4. (SBU) Bio Note: A journalist by profession who used to run the second largest weekly newspaper in India, Ambassador Afzal was previously a member of Parliament and served as National Secretary of the Indian Congress Party. Prior to his appointment to Turkmenistan he was India's Ambassador to Angola. END NOTE.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT: Ambassador Afzal was a thoughtful and engaging interlocutor. His journalism background has no

doubt contributed to his interesting perspective on events in
the region. END COMMENT.
MILES